

Troubles, Triumphs And A Pretty Nice Summer

By Monroe S. Miller

Call it coincidence, if you want, but I believe there is a groundswell of dissatisfaction with a lot of what goes on too often in our business and in our country.

The last issue of *THE GRASS ROOTS*, which carried an editorial addressed to some in our industry ("if the shoe fits, wear it"), was on the newsstand on June 28th. Papers from around the country carried a biting commentary by well known columnist Dave Barry in the June 24th editions. Mr. Barry's piece was entitled "Incompetence is crippling us."

Underneath this thin veil of humor, Barry ripped those in our country who build things like cars and appliances. He feels about some of those pieces like a lot of us feel about some of the grass machinery we buy.

I watched a little closer that week for evidence of Barry's and my feelings about the ineptness in this country, ineptness that is growing by the day and becoming more and more pervasive. Here are my highlights from that one week:

1. The Hubble Space Telescope is becoming a multi-billion dollar boondoggle. Apparently they cannot focus the telescope because some company in Danbury, Connecticut screwed up the polishing of the mirrors.

2. Massive amounts of money will flow from the northeast and midwest to the southwest and south where most of the failed S & Ls are located. They had crooks running them, yet our government "can't afford" to prosecute them. But we do have money to provide for the military defense of Japan. I can't figure that out.

3. President "Read My Lips" Bush now wants to raise taxes. Super.

4. Kohler announces the construction of a new factory complex in Mexico. They needed to do that to compete in the world markets. No UAW in Mexico.

5. The Space Shuttle program schedule was shoved back — again — because of leaking fuel tanks. The fuel tank on a new Briggs & Stratton engine of ours started leaking fuel, too. The very same day. How incompetent.

6. It appears AMC/Chrysler Corp. knew about some rollover problems with their Jeep vehicles, but decided to keep them a secret. Neat.

7. Pat Zurawski went to Menard's to purchase a dehumidifier for our computer room. He had to choose between a Whirlpool and a Samsung. The one from the "J" country, of course, had more features and an automatic shutoff. But he chose the Whirlpool — he has a stupid but loyal boss. Next time I may damn well choose the BEST one, regardless of where it is manufactured.

The lessons, once again, are obvious. Are we so dumb that we will not pick up on them?

I'll probably never get used to it, but that simple fact may be one that indicates I'm at least somewhat normal.

Just as sure as a change in the Green Committee chair

at our Club brings some trepidation, a visit from a new USGA Green Section Agronomist is a little unnerving at first.

When I was a student in Jim Love's turfgrass management program at the UW, we usually had an annual opportunity to listen to Lee Record, the Midwest agronomist for the USGA, either at a monthly WGCSA meeting or at the Symposium.

The summer I spent at Maple Bluff Country Club gave me a chance to meet Lee's replacement, Carl Schwartzkopf. When I began my work at Blackhawk Country Club, Carl made the first visit here. We became good acquaintances and still talk at each GCSAA conference. Actually, we usually argue over the Badgers and the MSU Spartans.

Suddenly, Carl wasn't the one making the inspection. I was notified to expect a visit from a gentleman named Zontek.

Well, as nearly everybody in our business knows, Stan became a highly respected and popular person in Wisconsin. I hoped, nearly to the point of prayer, that he'd be here for decades to come. His visits were extremely productive, his advice almost flawless and his reports to our membership at the Club were thorough.

Then he left. I felt betrayed.

I was damned upset. Until I learned of his replacement. Good Grief! Jim Latham, after a 25 year sabbatical from the Green Section, was returning. His assignment? The Great Lakes region, which included my golf course. What a relief.

It was great having Jim come to town for a half day each year. He was (still is) a prominent turfgrass expert with outstanding diagnostic skills, excellent communication ability — both writing and speaking — and he captured the confidence of two different green committee chairmen.

He was also a very busy person, traveling tens of thousands of miles and visiting a couple hundred golf courses in our region each year.

So it wasn't really a surprise when Lois Latham called to tell me that our 1990 TAS visit would be made by a new Green Section agronomist. His name, she told me, was Bob Vavrek.

Lois gave me a little background on Robert and added that he had been training with both Jim Latham and Jim Moore.

As July 5th approached, I became a little bit edgy. Our Green Committee chairman is a shrewd person, well read and serious about his responsibilities as chairman. He also serves as the club president this year.

On July 3rd, I called Lois for reassurance. "Does he know anything from a practical perspective? Or is he just book smart? How old is he? How big is he? Where's he from?" And so on.

Lois gave me another good report and told me to quit worrying.

That was good advice. After a productive visit I can give all of you a report on Bob Vavrek.

First of all, he was on time. In fact, he was early, by half an hour! I loved it. He was ready, in my shop, to go to work at 7:00 a.m.

He's well educated. Since he is a native of Ohio, one might expect that to influence his choices of colleges. He earned a B.S. degree from Marietta College (in Marietta, Ohio) and a M.S. degree in entomology from Ohio State. His major professor was WGCSA Honorary Member Harry Niemczyk. Bob is now completing the requirements for Ph.D. in turfgrass science at Cornell University.

He does, indeed, have a handle on the practical matters of our business. His advice was sound and creative at the same time.

I haven't received his report to the Club yet, but when I do, I'll report on the grade we give to it.

In the meantime, if you get a chance to have Bob Vavrek come to your golf course, welcome him. He'll help you a lot, just like Lee and Carl and Stan and Jim have for so many years.

There's truth in the old saying that Mother Nature knows best. It seems that a major outbreak of the gypsy moth caterpillars has been stopped by a natural predator.

The voracious caterpillars were expected to hit hard on trees in Massachusetts, southern Vermont, New York and Connecticut this year. Instead the entomologists from those states found a lot of dead caterpillars.

This phenomenon is so new that they don't know much about it. The fungus that is killing the caterpillars is *Entomophaga maimaiga*.

The fungus was introduced in Boston in 1910 in hope of imposing a natural control. Incredible as it seems, its effectiveness went unnoticed until last summer. Obviously, it was nearly forgotten.

Researchers have been studying the rise and fall of the gypsy moth populations for over a hundred years. They have noticed that they do well in dry years and seem to die off in wet ones. It may be that this phenomenon could be related to weather effects on the fungus.

It is really quite interesting, especially when considering that one of the methods of control tried in our state (Door and Kewaunee counties) is a program of spraying bacteria harmful to the moth.

Phil Pellitteri, UW-Madison entomologist and WGCSA member, received questions in mid-summer that were a bit different from those he normally receives during the height of the growing season in Wisconsin.

Instead of the panic type "what are the bugs that are eating my garden and grass?" Phil was hearing, "what happened to the cicadas?"

It turns out that the cicada population was quite spotty. There were a lot of the inch-long insects in the Lake Geneva area, with smaller numbers in Mazomanie and in Grant, Iowa and Walworth counties.

One of the reasons for reduced numbers of cicadas is development. A lot of former agricultural ground has been turned to streets and homes, disturbing the cicada habitat.

Although it would have been interesting to see and experience their anticipated arrival, it was also nice not having to deal with whatever nuisance and damage they may have brought to our golf courses.

On July 18 the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection advanced a proposal to ban the use of atrazine, an herbicide, in nine Wisconsin counties. The county I live in — Dane — was one of the counties.

If it is enacted, the ban would be one of the strongest actions against this ag chemical in the country. It would also be the most widespread state restriction on farm chemical use to date.

The alarm caused by the detection of extremely low (parts per billion) of atrazine in some farm wells in the state probably had a lot to do with this. So did the big push from the chemophobes.

Regardless of how it was done, the proposal raises concerns about where we'll be in our business ten years from now. Such news should inspire even more careful and judicious use of agricultural chemicals on our golf courses. It should also inspire those who haven't supported turfgrass research in Wisconsin to begin to pony up with their share of the money that will be needed to document need and safety.

I received a call from Dr. Lois Stack in late July. She's excited that the GCSAA has invited her to speak at our 1991 conference and show in Las Vegas. That's two consecutive years as a speaker; she deserves to be excited.

And proud. Congratulations to the former Nekoosa gal who received all of her education at the UW-Madison.

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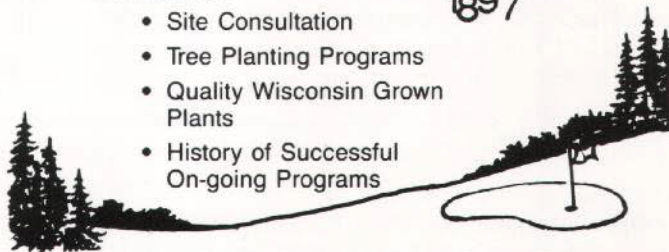
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Within a two year period, Lois will have addressed two GCSAA conferences, the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association national conference and the Maine Turfgrass Conference.

She's been published in *Golf Course Management*, too. We're pretty fortunate to have had her as a columnist in *THE GRASS ROOTS*.

There's a romantic among us! Who is it? Mike Lee, assistant golf course superintendent at Bluemound G & CC. Why? Because of the way he proposed to his lovely girlfriend Nancy Hanson.

Half the people in the state of Wisconsin saw him pop the magic question. Cheryl and I were watching the local news on August 6th when near the end of the newscast a "people feature" came on.

There was Mike, high above rural Wisconsin, north of Milwaukee. And cut into a grain field below them was Mike's proposal: MARRY ME NANCY.

The story of how he was able to carve 40' letters into the field is one not only of romance, but of persistence and determination.

It is also a story of careful planning. Mike was able to keep his secret project from Nancy all spring and summer. He was able to get her to go on an airplane ride without arousing any suspicion.

So well crafted was Mike's cover that Nancy wasn't aware that a "passenger" on the plane was really a photographer from a Milwaukee television station.

When they arrived directly overhead of the big question, the film rolled and captured her reactions. She was obviously and genuinely surprised. In the midst of her surprise, Mike placed an engagement ring on her finger.

Oh, the romance of youth! Nice touch, Mike!

A few days after Mike was on TV, I received a call from Denise Cochrane, a member of the headquarters staff of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association. Their headquarters office is located in Toronto.

Denise works with the CGSA publication *The Greenmaster*, and she called me to request permission to reprint Mike's story on professionalism (as well as another piece from *THE GRASS ROOTS*). I granted it, of course.

So not only is he soon to be married, he is soon to be an international author.

Congratulations on both counts!

The Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling that voided the Town of Casey local ordinance was met with relief here.

Iowans must have experienced a similar emotion when the following article appeared in the *Des Moines Register*:

"Local governments cannot enact their own tough restrictions on pesticide use because state and federal officials already control those chemicals, according to a legal opinion issued June 28.

The opinion, issued by Attorney General Tom Miller, pointed to a "rather comprehensive regulatory scheme" governing pesticides and said it wouldn't be fair for cities and counties to go beyond that set of restrictions.

"To the extent that a political subdivision in Iowa banned the application of pesticides by a commercial applicator. . . it would prohibit an activity which state law permits;" said the

opinion written by Assistant Attorney General Timothy Benton.

Benton conceded that a string of court cases have yielded results on both sides of the issue. An examination of the legislative history of pesticide regulations, however, shows that efforts to include specific provisions for local regulations were rejected.

The opinion was sought by Rep. Donald Shultz, a Waterloo Democrat who has written much of the environmental legislation the Legislature has approved. Shultz said local officials — particularly city councils — have discussed pesticide regulation but were uncertain of their authority.

One city, Sully, has banned commercial pesticide applications.

June 28th's opinion does not carry the weight of law, and the courts eventually would have to settle the issue. It is, however, a strong signal to local officials that enforcing local regulations would be difficult and that they are unlikely to survive a court test.

Environmental advocates have contended that a major source of pollution is chemical application in cities as homeowners hire lawn services to spruce up their yards.

Many of the chemicals applied to yards are herbicides and nitrogen-based fertilizers similar to those used by farmers, yet critics say there's no control or monitoring of those chemicals.

Particularly in a wet period such as this year, they say, chemicals can wash off lawns and into storm sewer systems that dump into rivers and streams.

Benton said there already is extensive regulation of pesticide application in state law, with the secretary of agriculture responsible for licensing and regulating applicators."

Then on August 1st, the Sixth Circuit, U.S. Court of Appeals, agreed (all three judges) to confirm PLCAA (Professional Lawn Care Association of America) vs. Milford, Michigan. In that case, decided last October, a Federal Judge ruled that FIFRA preempted local ordinances.

Another hooray!

I'll probably remember this summer for quite awhile as the summer Neil Rictcher retired. He seems too young, but that has more to do with my age than his.

In a relatively short time — about ten years — Neil had a distinct and positive influence on Wisconsin's golf course industry. He loved the machinery business and brought to us a lot of the positive things from the ag side of his company. His education as a trained engineer led to a lot of innovation and modification.

So enjoy your retirement, buddy. Hope the fish are biting!

This summer could easily go down as one of those you usually can only dream about. As I look back I remember a spring with little winter damage and an early opening.

A look back at the summer brings thoughts of ample rainfall and moderate temperatures. The really hot days came a few at a time; they were promptly relieved by showers and cooler temperatures. My goodness — we had a full week in the middle of July in our town when the high never climbed out of the 70s. Unbelievable.

That's not to imply there weren't problems, however. In late June, Green Bay and Brown County suffered a true disaster — almost five inches of rain in 24 hours. Some area courses, which included the Fox River Valley, were closed for days. Take a close look at the photos Randy Witt sent me of his golf course on June 23rd. Unbelievable again.

Shortly after that, southwest Wisconsin was blasted by some savage storms that did damage to many sites, including golf courses.

The biggest turnaround, in my mind, came in a report that said the Wisconsin River was at a 15 year high. Two years ago it was so low that the DNR forced Mark Kienert to do without water from the river for his golf course.

Despite the prosperous looking countryside and rain swollen rivers and lakes, our water tables are still low. Since we are enjoying such a nice season, let's wish for a storybook ending — a long, cold and snowy winter!

See you at the Symposium.



And you think you've had troubles? How about Randy Witt on June 23rd? Here's his third green from the tee — Oneida Golf and Riding Club, Green Bay.



Here's the third green again, picture was taken from a boat! That's an eight foot stick, too.



Oneida's 12th green, looking a little lonely.



Oneida Golf and Riding Club's #6 Fairway looking back from the sixth green.

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